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A constant Search after Truth, the necessary Result of a Trust in God: And a Neglect of a free uninterrupted Enquiry into Religion, the Effect of Presumption.

A
SERMON
PREACH'D before the
Univerfity of Oxford,
December 21. 1721.

WITH
A PREFATORY EPISTLE to
the VICE-CHANCELLOR.

By **GEORGE STUBBES**, Fellow
of *Exeter College.*

L O N D O N :

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MDCCLXXII.

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A constant Study of the
History of a People is
the Basis of a true Understanding of
the Principles of the
Government

SEER MON

Patron's Address

University of Oxford

December 21. 1721

WITH

A PREFATORY EPISTLE TO
the Vice-Chancellor

By GEORGE STURGEON, Fellow
of Jesus College

AND

Printed by W. L. at the
Printers Office in the Strand



To the Reverend

Dr. *SHIPPEN*,

VICE-CHANCELLOR of the
University of OXFORD.

Reverend Sir,



THE following Ser-
mon not having
had the Honour of
your Approbation,
it may perhaps seem
Importunity to of-
fer it a second Time to your Pe-
rusal : But since it is necessary for

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me to acquaint the World, that you have occasioned the Printing it, I flatter my self, that it will not be displeasing to you to be cleared, by this Publick Acknowledgment, from the fancied Imputation of having in the least encouraged, or even permitted it. The demanding a Sight of these Papers, so little deserving your Curiosity, in so Publick a Manner, may justly create a Suspicion in all who are acquainted with your usual Caution and Tenderneſs in Proceedings of this Nature, that you apprehended there was something in them liable to Exception : And the returning them, after mature Deliberation, with an Acknowledgment, that no Censure could be fixed on them, may

may no less reasonably be thought a sufficient Vindication of them, by such as are aware of the Acuteness of your Judgment. As I am equally unwilling to suffer under a Prejudice so easy to be removed, or to take Advantage of a needless Prepossession in my Favour, I submit to the hard Constraint you have laid me under of publishing this plain Discourse, for the Satisfaction of such as did not hear it. I should indeed think it inexcusable to doubt the Candour of the learned Audience, or to affront their Judgment by supposing the Necessity of a free Pursuit of Knowledge (which is the Sum of what is asserted in it) can be esteemed a dangerous or unwelcome Doctrine in those Seats of
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Literature, where it is so constantly experienced to be friendly to Truth, and which without the Liberty of it had been founded in vain.

I cannot conclude, without returning my Thanks for the Civilities I received from you, as well as for the Justice you have done me ; and expressing a Sense of my Unhappiness in being condemned by your Opinion, at the same Time I am acquitted by your Authority. But since, upon a strict Examination, you are pleased to allow the Doctrine I have advanced to be safe from that Censure you perhaps imagined it could scarce have escaped ; I own the Weakness of being perswaded, meerly from the
Force

Force of conscious Truth, that should you be induced to review it with a yet stricter Attention, you would find it, no less unexpectedly, guarded against your superiour Skill in Argument.

I am,

Learned S I R,

With due Respect and Esteem,

Your most Obedient

Humble Servant,

George Stubbes.

Force of conscious Truth, that
should you be induced to review
it with a yet stricter Attention,
you would find it no less unex-
pectedly guarded against your in-
terious Skill in Argument.

I am,

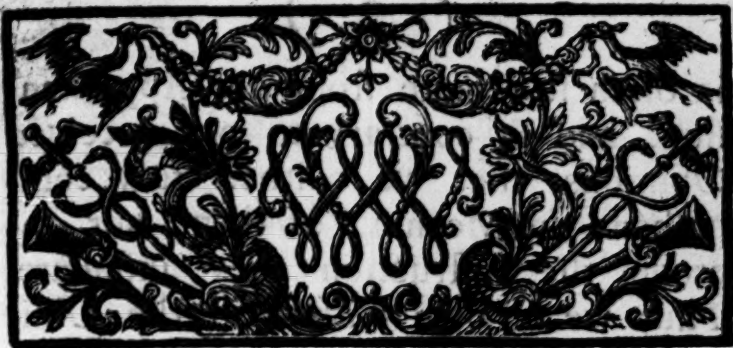
Yours &c.

Wm. Pitt Rivers

For my Cousin

Humble servant,

George Stubbins



PROVERBS III. 5.

*Trust in the Lord with all
thine Heart : and lean not
unto thine own Understand-
ing.*



HE graceful Simplicity of the *Proverbs* of *Solomon* makes them appear so plain and familiar, that we are apt to flatter our selves that we perfectly understand these *dark Sayings* of the *Wise*, and that we are fully convinced of the great Truths they contain: But the deep Wisdom, concealed under them,

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is often so remote from our Apprehension, and so contrary to our received Opinions, that we neither truly comprehend the Meaning of them, nor approve the Instruction they insinuate. Thus we all own with Zeal the Obligation, and the Advantage of trusting in God, and depending on the Divine Assistance in our Religious Enquiries: And every one pretends to be sensible of the Vanity and the Danger of presuming on his own Understanding, in Things of so high a Nature, and so great Importance. And yet the Hope of being, in any manner, divinely enlighten'd is, in effect, rejected by many with an inward Dread, as a Source of Delusion; and even censured, as a vain and dangerous Imagination: And an inviolable Adherence to their own Judgment, together with a strong Persuasion of the Sufficiency of it, in opposition to an humble Dependence on the Divine Conduct, and a Resignation of themselves to its mysterious Guidance, is, in their Esteem, the best Security from Error.

THIS Reliance on their own Understanding, which they highly approve in themselves, they at the same Time condemn in all such as have the Misfortune
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(or perhaps the Happiness) to vary from their Judgment in any Point that seems of Moment; and they often affect (not without great Inconsistency) to represent the Folly and the Guilt of it in the strongest Colours. But instead of pointing out the true Remedy of this Evil, they propose, as the proper Expedient for redressing it, to prevent Men from running the needless Risque of judging for themselves, by offering their Service to judge for them, and obliging them to accept the Favour. Thus instead of this Admonition of *Solomon*, "Trust in the Lord, and lean not unto thine own Understanding," their Advice is, in effect, "Trust (not in the Lord, but trust) in Us, and lean unto our Understanding."

THE Maxims of divine Wisdom, delivered in this sententious Parable, being thus liable to be misunderstood or perverted, I shall endeavour to unfold the Instruction it contains, and to display the Vanity of that false Wisdom that is set in Opposition to it, in its true Colours.

IN order to this, it is necessary, in the first Place, to explain the Nature of the Trust here recommended, and of the Presumption condemned. Now,

Now, the Trust in God, as it stands opposed to trusting in our own Understanding, more particularly relates to that Branch of this Duty, that obliges us to a Dependence on God in our Religious Enquiries: And it implies a firm Hope and Expectation of such a Measure of Assistance, as is sufficient for the Discovery of every Thing necessary to be known by us. The Grounds of such an Expectation are the Promises of God; and the Conditions of these Promises are the only Terms, on which this Assistance can justly be expected. And therefore a Command to trust in God, implies in it an Obligation to perform the Conditions, on which alone we are encouraged to trust in him. The Conditions of obtaining divine Wisdom are a Love of it, and a Search after it, as may be gathered from that beautiful Allegory, in which Wisdom is introduced thus inviting her Followers, ** I love them that love me: and those that seek me early, shall find me.* The Search after Wisdom, in which we are engaged by a sincere Love of her, and which she has promised to reward with

* Prov. viii. 17.

the Discovery of her self, implies a diligent Improvement of all the Means of attaining Knowledge, which Providence has put in our Power. These Means may all be reduced to the Exercise of our own Faculties, the Instructions of other Men, and the Divine Revelations, together with the various Administrations of the Holy Spirit : And consequently a due Attention to these several Ways of informing our Understanding gives us a well-grounded Assurance, that our Pursuit after Wisdom will be rewarded with Success.

HE that doubts, whether the Means afforded him are sufficient for the Discovery of Truth, so far as it is necessary to be known by him, betrays a manifest Distrust in God : and he that neglects the Use of them, can have no just Ground of Confidence in him ; since Wisdom * is so far from being promised to such as refuse her Instruction, and neglect the Methods appointed for the Attainment of her, that, on the contrary, it is expressly declared, that they shall in vain seek after her, when it shall be too late to find her.

* See Proverbs, chap. I.

It is evident from hence, that the Caution given us against leaning to our own Understanding, cannot be designed to restrain us from the Use of our Reason, or of any Assistances it may receive from Human Instruction, or from Divine Revelation ; neither can it be intended to make us diffident of our Capacity to gain sufficient Knowledge by the Assistances afforded us ; since the diligent Improvement of these Talents, and the Belief of their being sufficient, are included in the Trust we are commanded to place in God. It remains then, that this Caution must be levelled against a Persuasion of the Sufficiency of our present Attainments ; which can never answer what is required of us, so long as the Means of further Improvements are continually put into our Hands. And as they only can be truly said to trust in God, who, in constant Hope of attaining true Wisdom, continue faithfully to employ the daily Assistances lent them for a farther Discovery of Truth ; so they are guilty of leaning to their own Understanding, who think themselves already so well furnished with Knowledge, that they have no farther need of these Assistances.

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THIS Presumption consists either in entertaining such a Conceit of the Extent of our Knowledge, as to neglect encreasing it; or in adhering so obstinately to our receiv'd Opinions, as to refuse to submit them to a due Examination: and accordingly it becomes the Occasion of Ignorance or of Error.

AND it is observable, that both these Kinds of Presumption are equally dangerous, whether the Knowledge we fancy our selves to have attained, and the Opinions we have espoused, are the immediate Result of our own Reason, or the Suggestions of others: For in both these Cases we flatter our selves alike, that we are happily possessed of the Truth; and consequently we are apt to grow careless of removing our Ignorance, and rectifying our Judgment. Thus the high Esteem even of our borrowed Wisdom, and the fond Adherence to Opinions implicitly received from others, by tempting us to neglect the farther Improvements required, and to refuse the continual Supplies of Knowledge administred by the Hand of Providence, becomes the Occasion of destroying the Foundations of our Trust in God, and involves us in Presumption.

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As there are three different Sources of our Opinions, all which are acquired either by our own Observation, by the Information of others, or by Revelation from superiour Beings ; so an undue Confidence in the Knowledge, we believe our selves to have gained by these several Ways, produces three several Kinds of Presumption. The First, which seems the least dangerous, often occasions Singularity ; the Second, which is by far the most prevailing, commonly betrays us into Superstition ; the Third, which is the most assuming, gives Birth to Enthusiasm.

FROM this View of the Nature of a Trust in God, and of a Presumption in our own Understanding, it is evident, that the Former, by obliging us to a diligent Use of all the Means of acquiring Knowledge, naturally leads us towards the Discovery of Truth ; and that the Latter, by flattering us in a Neglect of the Methods of informing and rectifying our Judgment, tends to detain us in Ignorance and Error : For since all Human Wisdom is imperfect, and chequered with Mistakes and Prejudices, this will ever be the Effect of such a Confidence, even in those who are most advanced in the Pursuit of it, that their
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Understanding must remain fixed in all its Errors and Imperfections, so long as they rest satisfied, with their present Stock of Knowledge. From hence it plainly follows, that we ought to be continually advancing in Knowledge, no less than in Virtue; and that it is alike inexcusable to grow remiss, in either, from an Opinion of the Sufficiency of our past Attainments.

AND there is this farther Difference between those who, from a Sense of this Duty, are engaged in a constant Search after Truth, and those who have presumptuously given over the Pursuits of Knowledge, that the Mistakes of the Former will be removed, if their Endeavours prove successful, or at least excused, if they prove ineffectual; whereas the Errors of the Latter are confirmed by their Obstinacy, and may justly be imputed to their wilful Negligence.

THESE Considerations clearly evince the Safety of trusting in God, and shew the Danger of confiding in our own Understanding. But since the secret Conduct of many, and even the zealous Profession of some, discovers their Sentiments to be the Reverse of the Counsels

sels of sacred Wisdom, in both these Respects; I shall proceed to display the Vanity of that spurious Wisdom, which like a Shadow they embrace in its Stead, by laying open the Grounds of that Security, that tempts Men to rely on their present Judgment of Things; and by assigning the Causes of that Distrust in God, which makes them fearful of trusting to those Methods of informing their Understanding, which unerring Wisdom has judged sufficient for their Direction.

IN order to discover the dark Foundations of this Confidence in our own Understanding, I shall only point out such Considerations as ought to make us most suspect the Truth of our Opinions; and it will perhaps be surprizing to observe that these are frequently the strongest Inducements we have to depend on the Certainty of them.

AND, First, a general Consideration that ought to restrain us from being thus secure of any Error in our Judgment, is the narrow Compass of our Knowledge. The Force of this pressing Motive, to incline our Judgment to a just Diffidence, is best understood by Persons of the most extensive Reach of Thought, who are most conscious of
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their own Ignorance ; while those of a more confined Capacity, who are seldom seen to complain of this Defect, are little touched by any Reflections drawn from thence. Were it possible for a Person, little versed in the Disputes of Morality and Religion, to be at once let into a comprehensive View of all the various Opinions of the wisest Men of all Ages and Nations, together with the subtle and intricate Reasonings on which they depend ; how would he be lost in the infinite Mazes of Thought confusedly opening in his Mind ? And how would all his Confidence in his former unformed Notions on a sudden forsake him ? But this intellectual Prospect being closed from his Sight, he pronounces, without hesitating, on the few Objects that fall within his Observation ; and disdains to doubt, since he discovers no Appearance of Error.

I observe, in the next Place, that we ought to be doubtful of those Opinions in particular, the Reasons of which we have not fully examined.

AND yet how often is this Want of Examination the chief Ground of our Confidence in them ? How few (except the Artists themselves, who are skilful to deceive by well-mingled

Lights and Shades) how very few seem to be aware, what slight Colouring is sufficient to make a Falsehood look plausible to a superficial Observer, the Absurdity of which would plainly appear to him upon a close Inspection? It sometimes happens, by a learned Negligence of examining into the Mistakes, or Frauds, of his Favourite Authors, that a Person of a confiding Genius is taught to form an infinite Variety of the most beautiful Schemes of imaginary Science; while the whole Frame and Architecture of his Opinions represents, as it were, a shadowy Structure, which appears firm and substantial in a false Light, but vanishes at the Dawn of Knowledge.

I observe, lastly, That it ought to possess us with the strongest Suspicion that we are deceived in our Judgment, if it be not determined by a strict Regard to Truth, but influenced by meaner Motives: And of this we cannot but be conscious, when our Opinions are admitted without the Test of Evidence, and modell'd by our Interests and Inclinations. But this, instead of giving us any Jealousy of these willing Deceits of our Understanding, that are subser-

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vient to our present Ease and Convenience, makes us sollicitous to confirm our selves in this pleasing System of Thought, by arming all the Powers of the Mind in its Defence.

THUS Ignorance, Prejudice and Insincerity, instead of giving us a just Diffidence in our Judgment, betray us into a vain Security : And the same unreasonable Motives, in like manner, incline us to a Distrust in God, which we discover by rejecting the Means of Knowledge he has furnish'd us with.

THIS will plainly appear by considering them again in the same Order, as placed in this View. And, first, a Confidence in our own Understanding, arising from Ignorance, by giving us a Contempt of all the Parts of Knowledge that lie concealed from our View, occasions a Neglect of all the Means of gaining an Insight into them. Hence the Exercise of the intellectual Faculties, by Disuse, becomes difficult and painful ; a due Attendance on the most excellent Instruction seems a tedious Task ; and even the sacred Volumes, though containing such Things as engage the Curiosity of Angels, still desirous

sirous to look farther into them, are thrown aside as dry and unentertaining. Thus all the Sources of Knowledge are sealed up, the Mind lost to the Relish of Wisdom is immersed in the little Affairs and Pleasures of Life, and all the glorious Discoveries of Divine or Human Knowledge are despised as empty Dreams.

THE solicitous Adherence to our Opinions, which takes its Birth from Prejudice, is widely different from the thoughtless Security that proceeds from Ignorance. As the Effect of Ignorance is a Carelessness of improving in Wisdom, so Prejudice makes us fearful of pursuing our Enquiries too far. For it being determined by us, that our present Opinions are undoubtedly true, we consider every Deviation from them as an Apostasy from the Truth : And since a Search after Knowledge continually leads the Mind to new Discoveries, often opposite to our former Sentiments, our excessive Jealousy of every Change of Opinion makes us look on it with Horror, as the Employment of an unsettled Understanding, or rather the Sport of a wandering Imagination, perpetually running astray after Novelty.

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THE false Confidence that is insinuated by Insincerity, is of a more criminal Nature than the two different kinds of Presumption before-mention'd. In those the Mind, tho' prevented by a blind Neglect, or by a groundless Jealousy of Wisdom, from aspiring to the Possession of it, is not wholly void of all Regard to Truth: But this is a dissembled Security, concealing under it a conscious Suspicion that we may perhaps be even deeply plunged in Errors. And when we are thus possessed with a Hatred of Truth, it is no wonder that we are averse to all the Methods of discovering it; which we are therefore fearful of using, because we are unwilling to be undeceived.

THUS I have shewn, that a Persuasion of the Justifiableness of stopping short in the Pursuit of Knowledge, and a Fearfulness of being misled by following the Paths traced out by infinite Wisdom to lead us on to farther Attainments, often proceed from the same corrupt Motives: And as these Motives are variously blended in the Mind, the Presumption arising from them is more or less absurd or impious.

SUCH

SUCH is the Deceitfulness of Presumption, when entertained in a single Breast : But the Mischiefs flowing from it will be more largely displayed, by shewing the Influence it has on a People infected with it.

As Presumption in particular Persons has been shewn to consist in such a Conceit of their own Wisdom, as inclines them to neglect any farther Improvement of it; or in such a Persuasion of the Certainty of their Opinions, as makes them impatient of any Arguments against them : So that which answers to it in Societies, is the laying a Restraint on the Progress of Knowledge, or the fixing a Scheme of Opinions, founded on Human Wisdom, which it is not permitted fairly to examine. And this Presumption of the Sufficiency of the publick Funds of Knowledge, while the farther Improvements that ought to be made are neglected, or of the infallible Certainty of any Doctrines of meer Human Invention, as it might easily be shewn to proceed from the same Causes in Communities as in particular Persons ; so it tends to confirm and encrease that Ignorance, Prejudice and Insincerity, from whence it took its Birth.

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AND, first, wherever this restraining Method is steadily pursued by a Society, the Members of it must unavoidably be kept in profound Ignorance. They will remain in a great measure Strangers to the Learning of other Nations, who differ from them in their Schemes of Religion; the most valuable Monuments of sacred Literature, that are to be found in Countries peopled with Hereticks, will be thought necessary to be prohibited, together with the most exquisite Refinements in their Philosophy, if they seem interwoven with the supposed Errors of their Faith; and perhaps even the innocent Improvements made by them in inferiour Arts and Sciences will be suspected. And as the Infusions of foreign Knowledge will be carefully prevented, so the Advances made in the Learning of their own Nation will be heedfully watched over by the jealous Guardians of the Opinions adopted by the Community; who will not only severely discountenance such learned Performances, as seem to favour any forbidden Speculations, but will be alarmed at any uncommon Discoveries, the Tendency of which they do not discern. The Field of Knowledge, when enclosed within such nar-

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row Limits, will be left uncultivated, as affording little Pleasure or Advantage ; and even Men of generous Spirits, as well as the unthinking Multitude, will be diverted by such Discouragements from the untrodden Paths of Wisdom, and will betake themselves to meaner Pursuits.

IT is no less visible, that Prejudice will take deep Root amongst a People thus limited in the Boundaries of their Knowledge. The Inducements that prevail with the Herd of Mankind to espouse, without Deliberation, the Opinions which their Leaders, in tender Care, provide for them, are the Force of Authority and Example, the Charm of Custom and Education, or the like empty Shadows of Argument ; by which even those, who govern their own Judgments by them, confess, and even contend, that all other Ages and Nations, who trusted to them, have been deceived : And yet in the fortunate Climates, and happy Times, they themselves are placed in, they fondly presume these Engines of propagating Falshood to be employed with unerring Skill and Fidelity, in the Service of Truth. A great Number, even of those who are so nice as not to be contented with this popular

lar kind of Evidence, which has served for the Support of Religions spread through a great Part of the World, will be apt to fancy they have sufficiently acquitted themselves of the Task of satisfying their over scrupulous Judgments, if (like Flocks, contented to feed in the Pastures they are confined to) they apply themselves only to the partial Reasonings laid before them, which perhaps owe their seeming Strength to the Concealment, or the Misrepresentation, of the Arguments on the contrary Side, which it is not thought safe for them to hear. By this unfair Proceeding they become the more deeply entangled in their Prejudices ; and the more exposed to the Artifices of those who have the Direction of their Opinions.

BUT how widely so ever Ignorance and Prejudice may be diffused thro' the Multitude, who, by the want of Liberty to examine into the Religion of their Sect, are preserved from being conscious of any Errors intermingled with it ; the Knowledge of them, (if there be any such) or at least some Suspicion of the less obvious Truths they are obliged to profess, can scarce be so universally excluded, that Insincerity will not insinuate it self amongst the more

instructed Part of a Society thus managed in religious Matters. If Opinions are rewarded or punished, it is manifest there is a Bias put on Men's Understandings, tending to make them swerve from Impartiality, though they may indeed resist the Force of it: And as such Rewards and Punishments may possibly be misapplied, an uncertain Advantage is hereby gained to Truth, at the certain Risque of Integrity.

THUS, by Observations taken from the Model of the Church of *Rome*, I have traced the same Effects of Presumption in Societies, which I had before observed to be the Causes of it in particular Persons. If we compare these different Portraits of this Vanity, which is, as it were, painted in Miniature in a Mind elated with imaginary Knowledge, and is represented in larger Proportions, and more lively Colours, in a Body of Men placing an undue Confidence in a Scheme of Religion framed by Human Wisdom; the Resemblance between them will appear surprizingly exact in every Feature.

THE Contempt of Knowledge, naturally springing up in a rude unpractised Understanding, is copied by a general

neral Neglect of every Thing that tends to propagate true Religion in a Nation sunk into Ignorance, and insensible of the gross Darkneſs wherewith it is overſpread.

THE Fears inſpired by Prejudice, when the Errors we cheriſh with a credulous Zeal are in danger of being detected, give a lively Image of the Tumults of the People, whenever an Attempt is made to free them from Superſtition.

THE conſcious Endeavours to ſtifle in our Minds thoſe ungrateful Truths, by which our Frailties are condemned, repreſent the ſecret Springs of all the Perſecutions raiſed againſt ſuch as labour to advance true Religion in the World; which are always ſet on Foot by ſuch as have ſome corrupt Intereſt to ſuppreſs it.

THE ſecret Diſtruſt of God, which makes us fearful of employing the Faculties he has given us for the Attainment of Knowledge, is likewise the true Reaſon of the Reſtraints thought neceſſary by ſome to deprive the People of the Liberty of examining into their Religion. All the Colours that are employed to juſtify this Conduct (ſuch as their pretended Incapacity to judge for themſelves, their Unſkilfulneſs to interpret the

the Scriptures, the Danger of their being seduced and divided, with all the imaginary Confusion, which is sometimes represented as the Consequence of a general Freedom of Enquiry) are, in Effect, Arguments against their trusting in God; intimating, that he has not afforded them sufficient Light for the Discovery of Truth, and that it is not safe for them to depend on his promised Assistance in the Search after it.

THE superstitious Adherence to such Notions as have not been duly examined, but tamely submitted to by the Understanding, as Oracles, which it is thought an Impiety to call in Question, exactly answers to the unwarrantable Deference paid by that Part of a Community, who are not duly careful to inform themselves, to the Judgment of a few leading Members; who, under the Pretence of instructing them, are contented to receive, if not to require, from them such a blind Submission to their Doctrines, as there could be no Room for if they were duly instructed.

THE Violence and Injustice, with all the Train of fierce and horrid Passions, excited by a Hatred of Truth, are dreadfully exemplified in the barbarous Rage of Persecution, and the savage Cruelties
inflicted

inflicted on the bleeding Martyrs, who persevere in the Profession of it, by such as are arrived to so daring a Pitch of Presumption, that they not only trust in their own Understanding, but affect to compel all who are under their Power to trust in it.

THE same Analogy may be traced between the happy Effects of a Trust in God upon the Mind of a Person influenced by it, and the great Advantages that would flow from it if it were diffused throughout a People. For since a Reliance on the Divine Direction, engages the Mind in a sincere and diligent Pursuit of Knowledge, as not only safe, but necessary; it is evident, that a Body of Men, acting upon this Principle, cannot entertain the least Sense of Danger in it, much less can they restrain Men from it. Thus a Nation would be engaged by an humble Dependance on God in the most disinterested Search after Wisdom, assisted by the conspiring Endeavours of Men, and favoured by the propitious Influences of Heaven; and consequently all the Fruits of their successful Enquiries would be owing to this Divine Virtue. The noble Fruits of such Enquiries, and the rich Harvests of
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Knowledge that might be reaped from thence, like the Objects of a new Sense, of which we have yet no Ideas, are beyond Description: But, that the Interest of Truth would thereby be greatly advanced, may sufficiently be made appear, by representing some of the Advantages it would gain from thence.

I MIGHT observe, as the first and most obvious Advantage of a free Enquiry, that it is the only Means of encreasing our Knowledge: But since those, who are fearful of so nice a Scrutiny, seldom burn with a generous Thirst of new Attainments, though they seem extremely careful not to lose any Part of the Wisdom they already possess, it will perhaps be more convincing to let them see, that even that little Portion of it cannot be preserved and spread through a Society, without the same continued Search by which it was first discovered; since, however knowing any of the Members may be, they cannot impart their Knowledge to any who refuse to give themselves this Liberty. Every smallest Link in the most curious Chain of Argument must be consider'd, every Consequence must be weighed, with the same Impartiality, by the whole Tribe of Followers, as by the first Discoverer
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of any Truth ; otherwise something of Knowledge will be lost in the Conveyance ; and the more implicitly it is received, the more it will be diminished.

THUS the Truth is injured by the treacherous Submission paid to it, without regarding its Evidence ; and it must necessarily decline, in Proportion as the Examination of it is neglected. Those, who have thus easily purchased Knowledge, having been more fill'd with Admiration of those from whom they received it, than improved by their Instruction, if they attempt to propagate their borrowed Wisdom, will be more zealous to urge the Authority of their Teachers, than skilful to employ their Arguments ; and finding themselves unable to satisfy their more inquisitive Hearers, they will be apt to condemn, as prejudicial to the Cause of Truth, all such accurate Enquiries, as tend to discover their own Inability to advance it. It may perhaps be natural enough for Persons thus unqualified to display the brighter Powers of Reason, to think the safest Way of transmitting their Knowledge to Posterity, is by half concealing the Proof of their Opinions ; that by this mysterious Proceeding they may draw the greater Reverence, and escape the Hazard of

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Examination. But it not being possible to communicate Knowledge without the mutual Explanation and Attention necessary to discover its Evidence ; nor to cloath it in such plain Expressions, as will not often appear obscure and ambiguous to the Ignorant ; the succeeding Generations, contenting themselves with a Form of Knowledge (as with a hidden Treasure, not safely to be look'd into) will retain only a Shadow of the Wisdom of their Ancestors (by whose Industry it was first acquir'd) and while they strictly adhere to the Language used by them in delivering down their Doctrines, they will insensibly depart from their true Meaning.

As a free Enquiry is the only Means of preventing Ignorance, it is no less necessary for the Detection of Error. All other Methods of maintaining Truth may equally serve to support Falshood ; and wherever Ignorance prevails (as it must inevitably do, where a due Examination has been wanting) they are more likely to be employed in the Service of the latter : But this, as it gives a certain Advantage to Truth, so, if thoroughly pursued, it must prove the greatest Disadvantage to Error. It discovers Truth and Falshood by a gradual Advance,

Advance, as Light by a swifter Progress distinguishes Beauty and Deformity : They are alike upon a Level, so long as it is excluded ; but their Disparity appears, in Proportion as it gains on the Obscurity of the Subject by a close and serious Attention. Were we to judge of the Weight of Bodies, it would be absurd to hinder the Ballance from playing freely, lest we should be deceived by its wavering Motion ; or with superfluous Care to assist the heavier Weight, lest it should not of it self descend in the uncertain Scale. It is no less preposterous to hinder the free Pursuit of Knowledge, or to divert it by any Biass from its natural Course ; since it is no less sufficient to discover the Truth, in all necessary Points, than a just Ballance to determine the Weight of Bodies. Nay, so far is Truth from being unable to prevail by the Force of its unassisted Evidence, where-ever it is permitted freely to be disclosed ; that even where this Liberty is denied, it will at last rise under the greatest Oppression, and shine with the more distinguishing Lustre.

IN the mean time, since it is hard to find one Man entirely free from that intellectual Pride, (or Sloth) which hinders the Admission of Truth, it must be still

more difficult to find numerous Bodies of Men, who are not in some Degree influenced by it : But in Proportion as the Infection of it is less spread through any People, the more true Knowledge may be observed to flourish amongst them.

To the Prevalency of this Principle it is owing, that the Wisdom of this World consists in a Medley of Human Inventions, agreeable to the reigning Presumption, which varies in different Times and Countries ; while the pure unvariable Wisdom that is from above, (as it were, intercepted from our Sight by the confused Mass of changeable Opinions, like fleeting Clouds obscuring and diversifying the Face of Heaven) often exposes its Followers to the Rage of erring Multitudes, and the Contempt of the Ring-leaders amongst them, who meanly purchase the Honour of being reputed Patrons of Truth, by falling in with prevailing Errors.

THE State of the World being thus ordered, as it becomes a Field of Exercise to every other Virtue, it affords an exquisite Variety of Trials to those, who secure to themselves the Purchase of true Wisdom, by a Trust in God ; who, by reason of the Advantages their Opposers

Opposers have over them in worldly Wisdom and Power, are assaulted with Fears on every Side, lest they should be guilty of Imprudence in refusing to submit to their Conduct, or unable to sustain their Violence. But, notwithstanding the imaginary Danger of Delusion, or the real Terror of Persecution, urged against them by such as labour, by Force or Fraud, to seduce them from their Integrity, if they persist with Constancy in their holy Purpose, the Wisdom and the Power of God are engaged to direct and support them.

THUS, amidst the Darknes and Confusion that covers the Earth, sufficient Light is dispensed to all who are duly qualified to receive it, by the just Administration of Providence: And it is highly impious to presume, that they who by their wilful Blindness and Obstinacy render themselves incapable of the Divine Guidance, can be better instructed in Religion by any other Means.

THE beautiful Opposition between the Simplicity of those, whom it pleases God to enlighten with true Knowledge, and the Pride and Insincerity of those who are judicially left in Ignorance, ought to fill us with a Love of this Virtue, which is so eminently distinguished by
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the Care of Heaven, and with a grateful Sense of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness exerted in its Behalf, which was celebrated by our blessed Lord himself in this solemn Act of Adoration : * *Jesus rejoiced in Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou hast hid these Things from the Wise and Prudent, and hast revealed them unto Babes : Even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy Sight.*

* Luke x. 21.

